

Crabapple ZINE





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2020
KUURA







@lceps







SBURB & LOVE



Julia | @LemonBerry01 on AO3

Rating: T

Tags: No Game AU, Trolls on Earth AU, dark carnival, clowns, kidnapping, first dates, fluff, angst, minor injury (blood).

Karkat couldn't breathe correctly since he got here. This was the first time that they were going to meet, and it would be at the most popular place in the entire world. He stared at his phone, which was nearly cracking from the look of it. Dave never actually told him where he was at. Was he already in the park? Was he still in his shitty car Karkat had seen pictures of? He heard the ping of pesterchum go off loudly in his pocket and saw Dave was running a little late. Karkat wondered if he was just as nervous as him, or if it was just him being fashionably late. He thought that that saying was stupid.

Dave took one look at the park and sighed.

"Holy shit, I can't do this..." he was seriously considering not getting out of the car and just reversing it as far as he could go until he crashed into a different car, so he had an excuse to not go. It wasn't because he hated Karkat, but because he was scared. If Karkat was already outside of his car and waiting there then he had balls. Dave knew it was wrong in any case to ditch, and it was just him being weird. He shut the car off and messaged Karkat to wait at the C entrance. Karkat agreed, and Dave walked over there with jello legs. Anyone who ran by him made him freeze.

When he finally got to the entrance, there were still a lot of people. He felt it made it more calming to possibly indirectly spot Karkat than to actually find him easily, but when he looked at the benches he saw him. No doubt about it. He looked so short, he never said his height, but due to the anger he gave when the question was asked Dave had assumed he was probably a little over 5 feet.

Karkat felt the stare and looked directly at him. His face turned the brightest red Dave has ever seen in a troll. He slowly pulled up his phone to text him, all without looking at his phone. In perfect, all-cap text, Karkat asked if that was really him.

Dave knew this was it, no turning back now. He walked to Karkat as best as he could while trying not to sweat too hard. Then like a stone he stood there. Was he supposed to wait? Karkat stood up with shaking legs and stared in awe. In a blink, Karkat was suddenly hugging him. Dave felt himself jump instinctively but didn't refuse the hug.

'God, he's... so short.' Dave had unconsciously put his hands around Karkat's chest while thinking that, and it was the most warm hug he felt. When Karkat realized Dave was hugging him, he let go fast and his face got more red.

"I-I'm sorry."

"No dude, you gotta say no homo." Karkat's eyes got wide and he punched Dave lightly.

"DAVE STRIDER."

Dave started to laugh at his embarrassment, and it seemed like the whole world fell away while he laughed. Karkat couldn't help but notice that he was feeling the same way. He brushed himself off mentally and stared at the front gates of the amusement park. It was the first time he's been here.

"Dave, have you ever been here before?"

"Only once with John, it was pretty great we went on almost a fourth of the rides and we were here from opening to closing."

Karkat didn't understand it at first, but the conversation gap he was expecting from tv and movies, where all matesprit pairs can do after having a reunion or meet up in real life is sit and stand awkwardly, wasn't real. It felt silly to him, that this seemed so natural.

Karkat walked next to Dave, unsure if it would be too early to hold hands yet. John told him that premarital hand holding happened all the time but it was dangerous to just ask Dave now, he might think he was weird. Dave's hand had nearly grazed Karkat's, but he'd decided by the look on Karkat that it wouldn't be best.

When they walked into the entrance, a sweet smell of tea and sugar wafted in the air. Dave and Karkat weren't too taken aback, but when they observed the area it was mostly a pastel teen paradise. They really didn't look like they belonged there, but they weren't too inclined to leave early. The rides were not so entertaining, but most of the scenery was pleasing.

When they got out they decided to look at the directory, which had a map. Unfortunately they had landed in the kids play area section. The rides would increase in intensity and be more adult themed the more you progressed. It would be easy to walk there if they didn't brick off sections. Dave lifted his finger off the directory and pointed towards the Skaia Lift.

"It looks like we gotta go on those, in order to get there faster."

Dave looked at Karkat who had looked away from the ride. "What's wrong? Scared of a little height?" he started to chuckle but when Karkat didn't respond he stopped this banter and immediately got serious.

"I- I am..." Karkat admitted, and took a small glance at the sky lift.

"Don't worry, me too," Dave took Karkat's hand as gently as shaky hands could and stared in his eyes. "I got you, we got this."

Karkat was surprised, he'd never thought that Dave would be so... suave with his gestures. Karkat tightly held on and started blushing again.

"Don't tell anyone about my fear of heights."

"Eh? Oh right don't worry, I won't tell a soul..." Dave said while grinning and texting on his phone. Fortunately Karkat was too busy staring at the Skaia Lift. Karkat kept leaning farther away from everything except Dave, who was enjoying every moment.

When they had got on the Skaia Lift they were only twenty-five feet off the ground when Karkat started to wail to get off, but they kept going higher. Dave grabbed his hand and, like a pacifier, calmed down the nervous wreck. He started to make beatbox sounds but not in an attempt to freestyle rap, just swinging his feet slightly and laughing.

"Karkat, look, if you do this with your feet and look down, you'll look like a giant."

Karkat didn't dare look down, but when he stared at Dave from this angle, he could see his red colored eyes staring downward, showing the reflection of the ground. That made him look around when they got to the maximum height, eyes widening in amazement seeing all the rides, people, trolls and the themes for some sections.

"It looks so... massive."

"That's what she said."

"LET ME ENJOY THE SCENERY."

"I am already." Dave wasn't staring at the sky, the people or the themes of sections. He was staring at Karkat's eyes. Karkat didn't notice.

When they got back down, they made their way into the part of the park that was better. Karkat pointed to the Heat and clockwork section that had a lot of high rides. Dave looked at him questionably.

"What about your fear of heights?"

"Well, I can side step that... as long as you're with me and hold my hand." Karkat's skin flushed slightly after he said that. But Dave continued to smile.

"I don't mind." He said quietly, and before he could take his hand again he looked at the directory map next to them. There was another place simply titled 'Carnival'.

"We should go there first though, it seems pretty interesting." Dave started to lead but Karkat was unsure, could it be a human carnival with animals and fun rigged games? Or was it a culturally troll themed carnival? Karkat shook his head at how absurd that would be, and the thought was erased and they headed where the directory and the signs pointed.

Karkat's fear had mostly dissipated when they had arrived. Until they were entering the section. They were handed a small stack of papers. Dave and Karkat looked at each other questionably. The employee of the section was covered in face paint, proving Karkat's assumptions were far more true than he had thought. These papers entailed that there could be possible injuries, possible *death*??? Karkat's hands trembled while he held the paper, and looked at Dave who was finishing signing his name at the bottom. Karkat started to shout.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING!?"

"Hm? What's it look like? I'm signing a paper."

"DID YOU EVEN READ WHAT IT SAID?"

"Oh... No, but really I don't care."

"Are you shitting me?"

"It's okay, remember, I'll be with you the whole time."

Karkat couldn't refuse another offer to hold hands. Besides this is an amusement park there no way in hell they would get too hurt. And so with trembling hands Karkat signed the paper. The moment his hand held up the papers the employee took them. Leaving Karkat with a massive papercut. He winced but he pretended that it didn't happen.

Karkat was upset that he had to quietly keep the blood from spilling out instead of holding hands, but if there were a better time to explain, it should have been immediately. In Dave's ignorance he had grabbed hold of Karkat's hand and saw the blood.

"Oh my god Karkat, your hand is-"

"BIZZARE!!! IT IS HIM!" Karkat froze in place. Before Dave could turn around, someone had his other hand. Karkat began to flail and try to rip his arm away from the person which was now turning into a crowd. Karkat's eyes looked at Dave wildly as if to ask for help.

"Hey dude, let go of him-" Dave was violently pushed away by another bystander. It was at his point that they hoisted Karkat in the air. He now started to shout but the moment he did the others did as well. Not in fear but excitement. Before Dave was nearly trampled by the people of this nightmare, he followed the crowd, getting as close as he could to find him again.

Karkat's yell was supposed to be the loudest thing he'd ever heard, but in comparison to the hundred people around the area laughing and also cheering it was drowned out as if he was at the bottom of the pool. Dave knew that no matter what that Karkat was to be rescued. Though any other shrew of a person would have run off hoping they would return, Dave was always different. He took into consideration where the hollers were going and kept running farther and farther into the dark carnival's maze.

He spotted where they had taken him. It was nearly a twisted, specific spot of a place where they held Karkat. The cheers had died down and now he could hear Karkat screaming for help. He tried to push through but there were people stopping him. Dave knew this wasn't some silly game. If there was anytime to showcase just how powerful he could be, it was right now.

Dave swung at the first two people in front of him, stunning them enough to jump on the shoulders of two unsuspecting people and launching himself up. The crowd stopped to focus on where Dave would land to capture him. But the moment he fell back on the ground his shoes barely hit their palms before he pushed off of them. He spun harder than normal, making him fall down on the ground and be surrounded by people trying to attack. In one fell swoop he knocked half of them to their feet and had nearly gotten on stage.

Two people got a hold of him and started to pull him away, ready to destroy the progress he built up to, only for Dave to somewhat wiggle out of their grasp and fight off more people. The last row of people were ready to attack until he hoisted himself off of them and onto the stage.

The brutes that were going to initiate the part had lurched at him, with almost precise training, Dave had completely knocked the two out faster than anyone could register and yanked Karkat off of whatever he was on and ran.

"I am so sorry for not listening." Dave said out of breath, as the angry mob of clown conspirators chased them down. Karkat looked like he was dead in his arms, but it was just him being passed out of fear.

"...you can't hear me can you?" There wasn't a response but he could tell he was going to get completely yelled at and lectured by Kanaya the moment Karkat shared his experience. The moment they got to the gates of the exit.

Dave flipped off the employee that let them in and took Karkat to the nearest water fountain, splashing his face with water. Dave heard something absolutely horrifying, it sounded like a

chainsaw. Did Kanaya already catch wind of the commotion somehow? He looked down to see it was his boyfriend coming back to his senses, maybe that seemed more horrifying at the moment.

"DAVE I AM GOING TO KILL YOU!" he started to go on about how awful he felt, like he was going to throw up, until Dave saw his eyes after looking away for so long. Tears. Karkat was crying though it hardly sounded as if he was.

This was Dave's fault, he knew that already, but he didn't expect it to be this disheartening, to see the only person that he cared for this much break down because of his actions. Dave's hands trembled, they weren't trembling even during a fight with drugged trolls and humans, but now they were.

Karkat was done with shouting and was now only wiping tears that just didn't stop pouring. Dave couldn't hold back anymore and held Karkat's face with his hand, drying the red tears for him.

"I'm sorry, you warned me, I made a promise, and I broke it." Dave stopped himself and turned his own face to the side.

"If you want to go home and never see me again, I understand. It won't be the first time."

"...no." Karkat said softly, then he leaned forward to put his head on Dave's shoulder. "You deserve to feel bad, yeah. But I can't say that you broke your promise."

"What do you mean?"

"...I'm not sure." Karkat muttered.

Dave started to hug him, but it wasn't like the first one where he felt weird. It was one that felt so much more comforting for the both of them. They both knew they were here together, in each other's arms and both reflecting their feelings of uncertainty for what was really next. It lasted for a while.

"To think, we still have another two weeks together."

"No, we're not coming back here."

"Well shit. Actually that might be a good call. The tickets are a hundred dollars a piece."

"WHAT!? THEY'RE SO EXPENSIVE I SHOULD HAVE PAID FOR MY OWN!"

They both decided enough was enough for one day, and they left. Instead of feeling like they weren't for each other like movies told them sometimes, they knew at this point they were inseparable.

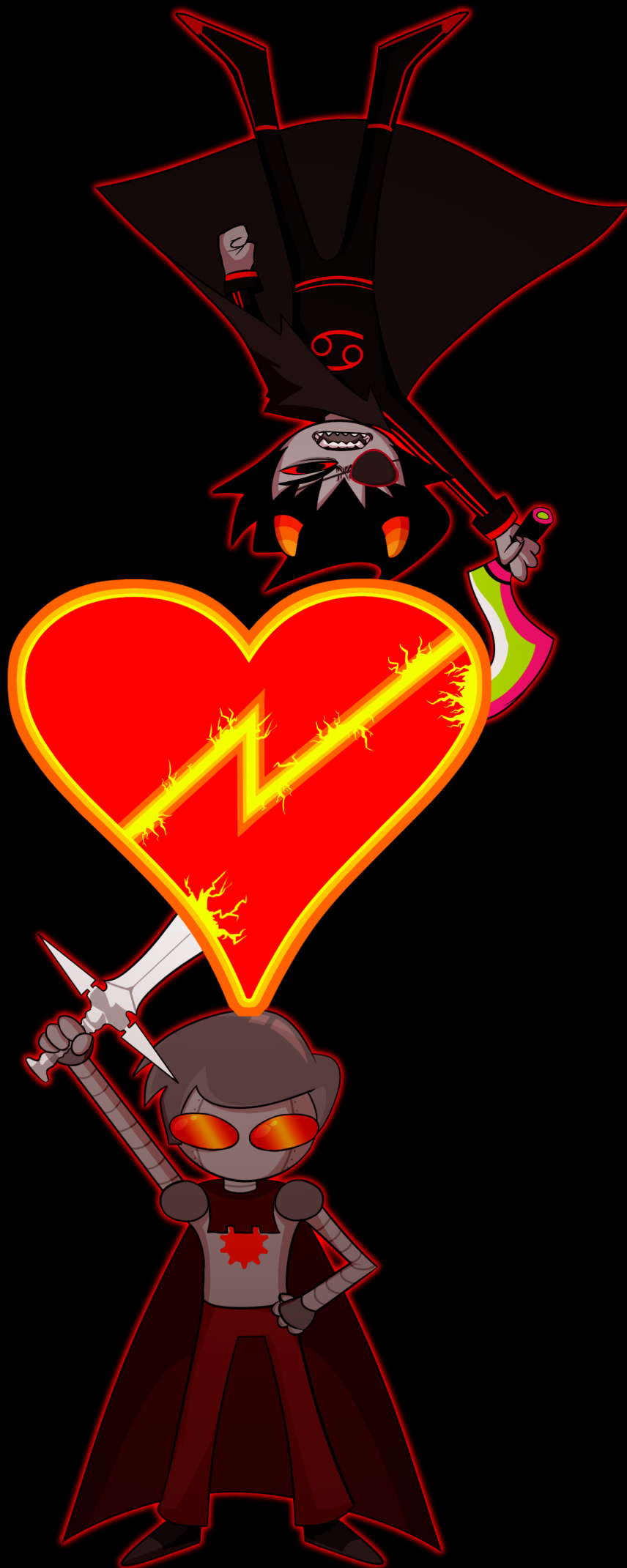
END





DisAppointments





SV/2





please let michael b jordan be shirtless



@thinglikerbucky on Twitter | arachnidstardis on AO3

Rating: T

Tags: meteor crew, post-retcon meteor crew, post-retcon, the retjohn, grubcake, Movie: Fant4stic (2015), background pale karnaya, background pale vrisrezi, background red rosemary, insectoid trolls, fluff

It's been a few months since you all arrived on the meteor. You could probably calculate the exact number of seconds that have passed since then (*nine million, ninety-eight thousand, eight hundred and-*), *but you don't want to*, because it's a little annoying. You're still getting adjusted to it, a few months out. It being the meteor, the dying and resurrecting right before being slam-dunked into a dark, dank laboratory, and meeting a bunch of aliens who'd been bothering you and yours for years.

Some things about it are cool. Flying, that's dope. All the stuff that comes with being god tier is rad, like the ever-clean cherry-red jammies, a complete end to the trials and tribulations of walking, and an internal set of chronometers fit to make you throw out any kitchen timers you didn't own.

Where were you? Right. A few months. The first night, everyone who wasn't in a fridge did a little exploring and found rooms close by to the computer room, redubbed the common area. That's where the trolls had apparently been camped out during their badgering campaign. Holed up in there like it was the night before the general election and all hands on deck need to be calling out to secure that vote. No, like it's ten hours till the launch of the new hit indie game and that game needs to be finished and packaged by midnight or so help me God, Derek, you won't be seeing that Christmas bonus. Those alien kids were harassin' y'all like it was gonna go out of style and you had to get the stylin' while the stylin' was hot.

That one got away from you.

Man needs a piss break every so often, and after some deep contemplation you decide to go grab some of the tasty snacks you keep hoarded in the closet of your cool new room. You're floating down the hallway towards your room, coming down from a high of lyricism. Feet a foot above the

ground, you reach the T-shaped corridor that branches off between y'all's bedrooms and the longer, spookier hallway that leads to the labs. On the wall facing the door to the common area is a poster you're particularly proud of making. It's for an as-of-yet-unmade **SBAHJ: hte moive**. You pause to admire it, bobbing slightly in the air.

Before you can continue, Karkat slams open his bedroom door with a bag on his shoulder and thunders down the hallway towards you. Things you are not used to on the meteor: the sheer energy exuded by this kid. The first week you thought you had pissed him off even worse than his all-caps text implied, but it turns out he just constantly operates at full throttle. No word left unyelled, no door left unslammed, no step left unstomped. He's an angry little dude and you are so glad you're a foot and a half taller than him.

While you were thinking, Karkat got within shouting distance of you.

KARKAT: HEY DAVE. LOOKING AT THAT ABOMINATION YOU PUT ON THE WALL?

You take it back. You are *extremely* glad you're a foot and a half taller than him.

DAVE: sup karkat

DAVE: i feel like i need to apologize on behalf of your terrible fuckin upbringing since you clearly can't see and appreciate what we call on my planet

DAVE: art

You say this while gesturing to your rad poster. A few of the stray artifacts hovering around it fizzle through your hand as you do.

So.

Fucking.

Cool.

Karkat rolls his eyes and lifts his hands for a dramatic air quote.

KARKAT: I'LL CALL THAT "ART" WHEN KANAYA WEARS CARGO SHORTS.

He smirks and pushes by you towards the common area. You hear his shoes smack the ground until he hits one of the carpets Rose alchemized.

If you roll your eyes at his response, no one will ever know because of your radical shades.

With that, you resume gliding towards your room. It had taken about three days aboard the meteor for you to alchemize the lock on your door. It's time-based, so it won't unlock until its internal timer ends. Or, until you speed up its personal time field a hundred years. You press your hand against the lock to do just that, and your door pops open. Even if you already didn't have strong feelings about boundaries, Terezi *really* likes to lick your clothes. You don't think you could

stand it if all your non-magical suits and shirts got weird, goopy teal spit all over the brightest red parts. With your fancy-pants lock, no one gets in but you.

Floating slowly over to the closet, you spin in midair so you can grab some things from your snack shelf. Bending over? Hurting your knees? Pfft. That's for chumps who can't fly. You? You're not a chump.

You roll on your back and hold your snacks on your stomach like an otter, kicking your feet a little as you hover back out the door. When it clicks shut, you spin the "years" dial on the lock to "83," and drop it. Your best back-hoverstroke takes you down the hallway into the common area. You're careful to balance your snack haul along the way. No Slim Jims down on this trip.

Karkat has gotten settled into the common area since you last saw him. You look at his upside down figure seated at the table near the coffee machine as you fly over to him, unwrapping a savory stick of beef jerky.

Safely above the table, you flip over, dispensing your snacks. Karkat jumps as a Twinkie lands near his weird green spongy snack. He's eating it with a fork. You think he calls it grubcake? You settle into the chair next to him and munch on the jerky.

Karkat pulls a few DVDs out of his sylladex and slaps his hand on top of them.

KARKAT: OKAY.

KARKAT: BEFORE I EXPLAIN, YOU HAVE TO PROMISE TO LET ME FINISH BEFORE YOU START GIVING ME ANY HOOFBESTSHIT ABOUT WHAT I DID TO GET THESE.

KARKAT: ALRIGHT?

You chew the jerky a bit more and swallow most of it.

DAVE: you know that youve now primed me to razz you about however you stole this thing or whoever you stole it from right

KARKAT: ABSOLUTELY NOT, NOW SHUT THE FUCK UP. I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA TO HAVE A MOVIE NIGHT, BUT THE LAST TIME WE TRIED TO HAVE ONE -

DAVE: it turned into an absolute shitshow because we couldnt decide on a movie and you and rose almost started a fistfight over bridge to terabithia

Karkat sighs and stabs his fork into the grubcake. It jiggles a little.

KARKAT: YOUR SHITTY HUMAN VERSION IS MISSING AN ENTIRE CHARACTER THAT ADDS TO THE ROMANCE AND GUT-PUNCH ENDING.

KARKAT: ANYWAYS!

He lifts his hand off of the pile of DVDs. You take a closer look. None of the titles are recognizable to you.

KARKAT: I USED SOME OF YOUR ALCHEMETER ATTACHMENTS WITH THE CODES FOR SOME MOVIES.

KARKAT: YOU KNOW, THE ONES THAT CAN MANIPULATE AN ITEM'S TIMELINE?

KARKAT: APPARENTLY A BUNCH OF MOVIES GOT REBOOTS IN THE 2010S AND 2020S.

You take a look at the stack again. There's some Star Wars films you don't recognize, something that looks truly heinous titled "The Emoji Movie," and a couple of movies based on weird old novels you might have seen Rose talking about from her homeschool classes. At the top of the pile is a movie titled, "Fant4stic," which. Wow. You pick it up.

DAVE: i gotta admit the 2005 version of this movie was just absolutely fucking horrible

DAVE: except for chris evans

Karkat leans back in his chair and beams, gesturing with his long claws a bit. It looks like someone's painted them? They're jade and black, a little shiny in the weirdly blueish overhead lights.

KARKAT: THE ABSOLUTE BEST PART OF THAT MOVIE WAS TROLL CHRIS EVANS HAVING A FUCKING BLAST SAYING THE STUPIDEST SHIT.

He thumps the table with a fist and the fork shudders, still in the cake. Jesus.

DAVE: absofuckinglutely and I have no idea how anything else is supposed to top how god awful that movie was

DAVE: that being said

You slap the cover.

DAVE: this one

KARKAT: OKAY.

Karkat claps his hands together and points them at you.

KARKAT: CAN I SELL YOU ON THE HELLBOY REMAKE.

DAVE: no i have this movie in my hand and i have to watch this absolute trainwreck

KARKAT: DAMMIT.

KARKAT: FINE.

KARKAT: HOW ARE WE GOING TO CONVINCE THE GIRLS?

He makes a good point. Terezi and Vriska will spend the entire time cuddling and making fun of whatever you guys watch, but the tricky part is selling Rose or Kanaya on a movie. Once one was convinced, the other would eventually acquiesce, but the trick was figuring out which one of them to go for.

You flip the DVD box over, looking for more information. There's only one named woman you can see in the summary, which isn't a great start towards convincing the meteor's resident fussy lesbians they should participate.

Wait. You look closer at the image of the blonde woman on the back of the box, then flip the whole thing over to look at the front again.

DAVE: did they change her hair in the middle of this movie?

Karkat looks at you, annoyed. It's rare he doesn't do that.

KARKAT: HOW THE FUCK AM I SUPPOSED TO KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THESE MOVIES? THEY'RE FROM A VERSION OF YOUR PLANET THAT YOU WEREN'T EVEN AROUND FOR.

KARKAT: I DON'T KNOW JACK ABOUT SHIT.

DAVE: you got that right at least

You quickly shove some jerky in your face before Karkat punches you in the shoulder. You float a foot away from the table. Fuck, you forgot to actually sit down in the chair.

Karkat snickers and eats another bite of the grubcake.

KARKAT: ANYWAYS, BACK TO THE PROBLEM AT HAND.

KARKAT: WHAT IF WE USED THIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO KEEP VRISKA AND TEREZI DISTRACTED SO THEY DON'T TRY TO PRANK KANAYA AND ROSE'S DATE LIKE LAST WEEK?

KARKAT: I'LL BET THEY'LL APPRECIATE IT.

Hm. Rose had been complaining to you earlier about how she wanted to have a private moment with Kanaya without having to lock a door and come on too strongly. You agreed, but you were way less intimidated by Terezi when she was lines of text bothering you and you couldn't see that she had not one, not two, but *several* rows of sharp teeth in her mouth. She was kind of terrifying. In your opinion, she was far scarier than her partner-in-crime.

From your observations and from what Karkat told you, Vriska was a petty asshole who took things way too personally and had a pathologic desire to seize the spotlight. It was like living with all of Team Rocket rolled up in one person.

Terezi, though. She actually thought a bit about what she was doing, and the pranks she was able to plan and execute with Vriska had felled every single other meteor resident, save the Mayor.

Even Terezi wouldn't fuck with the Mayor.

You finish the jerky.

DAVE: alright

DAVE: operation distract team scourge sounds like a go

DAVE: how about you tell kanaya so she can surprise rose and ill convince terezi that movie night is a good idea tonight.

Karkat grumbles a little, but looks down at his nails and nods.

KARKAT: YEAH, ALRIGHT.

KARKAT: MAKE SURE THERE'S A BUNCH OF STUFF FOR THOSE SHAMELESS FUCKING HARLOTS TO BUILD A PILE IN, AND THAT'LL SEAL THE DEAL FOR THEM.

DAVE: you mean like the pile of fabric and pillows i found you and kanaya in last mon-

KARKAT: SHUT THE FUCK UP!

He roars and kicks your chair over, and you go somersaulting backwards through the air, cackling. Luckily you haven't opened the soda in your hand yet, or you would find the entire thing a lot less funny.

Two hours later, your plan seems to be going swimmingly. You invited TZ down to Can Town to subtly bring up the idea of a movie night. She's sitting across from you now, holding a stick of chalk in her mouth. There's chalk dust covering her entire front as she used the blue and white to expand the highway system. You never seemed to have *any* red or green chalk in Can Town.

DAVE: so

DAVE: any plans for relaxing tonight pyrope

You try to keep your tone casual. Can't have her catching onto the plan too quickly.

She snaps the chalk with her teeth and a little puff of powder floats away from her. Your brain flashes up the mental image of her sitting in a P.I.'s office smoking a cigar, the black and white ambiance replaced by a technicolor rainbow filter.

You are absolutely drawing that later, especially if you can get anything half as dope as the picture in your head onto paper.

TEREZI: NOT R34LLY

TEREZI: 1S TH1S YOUR SLY COOL-GUY W4Y OF 4SK1NG M3 OUT ON ON3 OF YOUR HUM4N D4T3S?

She winks at you before throwing her head back and cackling.

DAVE: youd be funnier if you didn't make that joke every other time i asked you to hang dude

You're coloring in the lines she's drawing with some black paint. Rose gave you the code for it. The paint beat the oil the Mayor had been using before by a landslide, and you didn't have to keep dragging Terezi to Kanaya to replace her clothes when they got too grimy.

Rolling back into your field of vision, chalk street named stamped onto her clothes, she pouts.

TEREZI: TRU3, BUT YOU BLUSH3D TH3 F1RST F3W T1M3S 1 D1D
1T, 4ND 3V3NTU4LLY 1'LL C4TCH YOU OFF GU4RD 4G41N
TEREZI: WH4T COOL 3V3N1NG PL4NS DO YOU H4V3 TO SUGG3ST
FOR M3, B1G M4N ON C4MPUS?

Terezi throws a piece of chalk at you that bounces off your right shoulder.

TEREZI: D1D 1 H1T YOUR F4C3? 1 W4S 41M1NG FOR YOUR F4C3

You don't answer her, lobbing the chalk back.

She catches it.

Son of a bitch.

DAVE: karkat alchemized some weird movies from an
alternate timeline earth that kept goin for a decade or
two after we blew it up from some of my old dvds
DAVE: i picked the one that looked the worst without
being too unpalatable
DAVE: you down to dunk on it with me and your girlfriend

Terezi blushes.

TEREZI: SH3'S NOT MY HUM4N G1RLFR13ND, D4V3.
DAVE: oh now whos caught off guard
DAVE: shes your troll girlfriend obviously

You duck, and the piece of chalk narrowly misses your head. She is startlingly accurate for a blind chick. This is what you mean about her being way more lethal.

TEREZI: 4LR1GHT, 4LR1GHT, F1N3. 1'LL BR1NG VR1SK4 TO
YOUR T3RR1BL3 HUM4N MOV13 N1GHT.
TEREZI: W31RD TH4T YOU W4NT TO W4TCH US W4TCH 4 MOV13,
BUT WH4T3V3R.
DAVE: i dont want to watch you watching the movie i just
want to watch the movie
DAVE: also karkat will be there since they're his movies
TEREZI: OH, B3C4US3 TH3Y'R3 H1S MOV13S. OF COURS3.

You very pointedly don't say anything and keep looking at her.

TEREZI: 1 S41D 1 W4S GO1NG TO COM3!

You punch her in the shoulder and get up, stumbling over a few stray romance novels you guys have been using as roofing to retrieve the errant chalk pieces.

Step 1: Complete.

Step 2, "Occupy Team Rocke- you mean Scourge for several hours that evening", also started off well in your opinion. The four of you had been camping out in a room a few doors down from the

common area that you and Karkat had turned into a home cinema. There was a projector mounted high up on the wall, the floor was covered in massive bean bags the two of you had alchemized from some of Terezi's plushies, and best of all, there were *plenty* of snacks. The menu screen for "Fant4stic" has been on the far wall for a while, and Vriska and Terezi are arguing about how to pronounce the name of the movie.

TEREZI: 1'M PR3TTY SUR3 K4RK4T M3NT1ON3D 1T'S B4S3D ON
4N 34RTH MOV13 C4LL3D 'TH3 F4NT4ST1C FOUR,' SO M4YB3
YOU'R3 SUPPOS3D TO S4Y TH3 '4' 4FT3R 'F4NT4ST1C?

Terezi's face is screwed up as she sniffs at the projection on the wall.

Vriska also scowls.

VRISKA: No, listen, I'm with you on the logic of that
st8ment. However, it would 8e waaaaaaaay funnier if you
pronounce it 'Fant-four-stick.'

TEREZI: M4YB3 1T'S JUST SUPPOS3D TO B3 'F4NT4ST1C...'

VRISKA: Your quirk totally 8utchers that, 8a8e.

Yeah, you probably should have figured that the title screen of this movie alone would be enough to distract them for a while. You're also impatient and want to see if you'll get to see "Michael B. Jordan" shirtless in an improvised snow hot tub as well. You nudge Karkat, who is seated next to you on the other leg of the massive dragon plushie y'all've taken for yourselves.

DAVE: hey

DAVE: karkat

DAVE: can you start the movie

Karkat swallows the grubcorn he's eating (it's tiny, air-popped insects. You scoot a little further back onto your dragon leg), and sighs.

KARKAT: ARE YOU TWO ALSO READY TO WATCH THIS MOVIE,
WHATEVER IT'S CALLED?

You both look over. Terezi and Vriska have stopped mid-wrestle, Terezi with her jaws about to close around Vriska's ankle, her moirail reaching to pull on one of Terezi's horns. Vriska uses the distraction to flip Terezi over and sit on her, exclaiming her victory.

VRISKA: Yes!!!!!!!!!!

TEREZI: OK4Y 1 W4NT TO JUST W4TCH TH1S STUP1D TH1NG 4ND
NOT G1V3 4NY MOR3 FUCKS 4BOUT WH4T3V3R TH3 H3LL 1T'S
C4LL3D.

Terezi attempts to crawl out from under Vriska. Vriska leans a knobby elbow on Terezi's head and gives a thumbs up.

VRISKA: Yeah, sure, I'm ready.

VRISKA: Pass me some gru8corn, though.

Karkat pulls out another bowl of grubcorn, and hands it to you to give to her. You do not make eye contact with any of the insects as you gingerly extend the bowl away from you. Jesus, trolls are gross weird aliens. You chew your far superior and way less gross dried beef product smugly. The air smells of jerky and chitin.

Predictably, you get about ten minutes in before Vriska and Terezi start yelling at the screen and throwing grubcorn. You're only half-paying attention to the kids in a shitty old garage, waiting for the moment when Karen Storm or whatever her name is has her hair change and puts on that terrible platinum wig. That, or a shirtless Michael B. Jordan. There has got to be a better movie you can watch that shows off that dude's bod more.

You turn to Karkat, who is of course actually following this terrible movie.

DAVE: hey karkat

DAVE: do you think you could alchemize a bunch of different movies with the same actor in them if you had one movie with that actor in it

Karkat snorts, but doesn't turn away from the projection.

KARKAT: WHY, DO YOU HAVE A PARTICULAR HUMAN ACTOR YOU'VE BEEN MISSING OUT OF YOUR SPANK BANK YOU WANT ME TO HELP YOU RE-ACCESS TO ACHIEVE A SPECIAL BOYHOOD DREAM OF YOURS?

DAVE: wow no what the fuck dude why would you say that

KARKAT: IT JUST SEEMED LIKE THE KIND OF REASON YOU'D ASK.

KARKAT: ANYWAYS, WHY DO YOU ASK?

DAVE: okay see now that you say that it sounds dumb

KARKAT: JUST TELL ME DAVE

DAVE: okay so michael b jordan is hot

KARKAT: GOD DAMN IT.

Karkat grabs another handful of grubcorn and stuffs it in his mouth, refusing to look back at you. God damn it indeed. You just wanted to see this dude take off his shirt. Nothing weird.

The movie proceeds uneventfully for the next twenty minutes. The kids in the garage turn out to be the main dudes who will become Stretchy and The Rock, and they meet up with Storm daddy who is also the general of a tippety-top secret project. You realize you're paying more attention than you thought you were when you start yelling at the movie:

DAVE: victor no what the fuck thats obviously not stable

DAVE: jesus

DAVE: thats why youre fuckin careful when you step onto dangerous alien planets

KARKAT: SO YOU WERE EXACTLY THIS CAREFUL THE FIRST TIME YOU STEPPED ONTO YOUR DUMB LAVA FACTORY PLANET THEN?

DAVE: no captain hindsight i wasnt exactly as careful as the dude who im currently yelling at on the television

DAVE: is that what you wanted to hear

KARKAT: I MEAN

KARKAT: YES, BUT NOT IN SO FEW WORDS SO IMMEDIATELY.

DAVE: and how does that make you feel karkat

KARKAT: YOU DON'T GET TO TURN THE TABLES ON ME THAT QUICKLY, YOU ROTTING PIECE OF HOOFBEAST HINDQUARTER.

DAVE: looks like i just did

DAVE: also shut up something weird and unusual is happening

KARKAT: DON'T YOU ALREADY KNOW WHAT HAPPENS IN THIS MOVIE?

DAVE: shh

You are paying rapt attention to this movie. The plot has just hit its second time skip and yet another location jump to somewhere in South America you think? Central America? There was a caption you missed. You think you've seen a few weird blonde wig shots and you're enjoying the absurd, disconnected plot.

Finally, everyone on the team ends up back at the military headquarters, and they recover the dude they left behind. You and Karkat both make a face at the Doctor Doom design reveal - sorry, his name is just "Doom," you guess.

DAVE: wow what the fuck

VRISKA: 8oooooooo!!!!!!!!!!

TEREZI: HISS

KARKAT: WHAT THE ACTUAL SHITFLIPPING FUCK

It's.... Not great. Most of the decisions made during this movie were not great at *all*. You might even go so far as to say it is, if you wanted to use a ten-dollar word, "bad." More grubcorn hits the wall.

KARKAT: HEY, I HAVE TO VACUUM THAT OUT OF THE GIANT PLUSHIES
LATER

KARKAT: STOP IT

TEREZI: OH, W3LL 1N TH4T C4SE.

Terezi crushes a fistful of grubcorn and scatters it above her head. Some bits get caught in her hair as they flutter down through the air, and Vriska spits some out of her mouth.

VRISKA: 8a8e, chill.

TEREZI: UGH,

TEREZI: SORRY.

The rest of the movie viewing session rides out the wave of hatred y'all picked up from the Doom reveal to the end, with all four of you heckling and screaming what could generously be called a

film. As soon as the credits start rolling, Vriska picks up Terezi by her neck and holds her under her arm, then hovers a little.

VRISKA: Well, this has 8een gr8, but we need to get 8ack to our regularly scheduled strife pr8ctice.

VRISKA: See you l8tr, l8sers.

TEREZI: VR1SK4 1S TH1S R34LLY N3C3SS4RY

VRISKA: It sure is!

VRISKA: Scourge team out.

Vriska flies out the door as Terezi kicks and attempts to get loose from the armlock she's trapped in. You and Karkat are left to listen to the end credits music, lit by flickering blue light.

DAVE: so

KARKAT: SO

DAVE: was that worth the grist and time we spent on it or what

KARKAT: ABSOLUTELY NOT

KARKAT: THAT'S WHY I ALCHEMIZED IT

DAVE: see now you're catching on

DAVE: pickin up on some of that good ol fashioned irony the stri-dog has been peddlin to you since day one

DAVE: hell yeah hell yeah alright

You shoot him some finger guns, and imagine that the light from the projector gives you a starburst on your shades. That would be so cool.





Mance
D. Di's
@anamorphant









V I L L Y O U M A R R Y M E



just got engaged

6/12/xxxxxx



it doesn't matter where the trolley goes
(because soon enough we'll find our own way home)



@earthseaBorealis on AO3 | Mati | @earthseaborealis on Tumblr

Rating: T

Tags: Humanstuck, Filipino Karkat, College AU, established(ish) relationship

Karkat rested his body against an ivy-covered brick wall. He was cool, casual, and totally not freaking out at all. It wasn't like he'd just rushed out of his apartment with only one shoe on and his jacket fluttering behind him as he ran down his apartment's stairway. Nothing of the sorts.

Okay, maybe that was a bit of a lie, but hey, it wasn't his fault he was running behind! His shift at Chick-Fil-A (fuck that homophobic restaurant) ran late due to an utterly obnoxious older couple, who's, quote-on-quote "bun" was overtoasted. A bun of all things for God's sake! It was complete and utter bullshit, but all Karkat could do was put on his customer-friendly smile and give them a coupon for a free combo meal if he wanted to keep his job. Well, he didn't really want to, but how else was he supposed to afford university? Premedical study programs were fucking expensive.

Except that wasn't all! Of course, the couple decided to tell him literally a minute before his shift ended. Heaven forbid they talk to anybody else except for the short Filipino boy trying to clock out for the night. He'd get a bit of extra pay thankfully, but literally any other day would've been better. He already had a tight schedule, class from 11:30-1:30, work from 2:00-6:30, and date night at 7:30. Time was, quite literally, against him.

In a span of forty-five minutes, he had to catch the metro back to his apartment, shower the smell of greasy chicken off of him, feed Crabdad - his adorable chubby pug - and make himself look presentable (hey, eyeliner took a lot of time to apply), all while trying to catch a bus downtown.

Thankfully, he was able to catch the bus right before it left the station, allowing him to still be the punctual bastard he was, and always will be.

So, there he was, leaning casually against the brick wall of an old bowling alley, taking in the wonderful smell of teenagers and sketchy old men smoking outside, and scrolling through his not-updating Twitter feed, constantly looking up to see if Dave was there. It was fine. Dave said he'd be a little late since he was finishing up a photo shoot, but that didn't do much to calm Karkat's nerves. He knew his boyfriend would never just stand him up, but his wretched douche-balloon of a brain begged to differ. That same stupid part of his brain anxiously wondered if he still reeked of greasy chicken. Fuck. Had he even put on enough deodorant, or was he going to scare Dave away with his horrendous smell?

He almost dropped his phone in shock when he looked up and actually saw the outline of the one and only Dave Strider. He was dressed in his normal shades and ripped jeans, but he had switched his normal t-shirts to a button-down flannel, though he wasn't sure if it was for their... date or just his previous photoshoot... he always said something about making a good impression on his clients or whatever.

"Yo! What's up, Kat," Dave yelled, running towards him and waving. Oh god, he was making a scene... again. Karkat's face flushed as everybody in a fifty-mile radius turned to look at them, but Dave seemed unphased, "Sorry I'm so late! Young couples can just talk forever, y'know? Not saying I don't love it, but sometimes a dude just wants to meet his date on time for once."

"It's fine, just stop shouting before some mom yells at us for scaring her kids or whatever the fuck they do now," He grumbled, choosing to lace hands with the other boy and drag him inside.

Karkat's nose crinkled almost immediately upon entering the building. There was a fading smell of cigarettes and marijuana, way too much for a supposedly 'family-friendly' business, mixed with sweaty teenagers trying to impress their newfound love interest. The only thing that kept him distracted from the absolutely pungent smell was the brushing of the pair's hands. The romantic side of him begged to take a hold of the other's hand, to squeeze it tight and to never let go, forgoing a decent score and instead, lifting the heavy bowling ball with a single hand, the other intertwined with his partner's.

Yet the braindead shit-stench of an asshole he called himself begged to differ. He obviously had a reputation to upkeep, and he wasn't about to lose to a douche with vomit-inducing sunglasses and abnormally sweaty hands.

Karkat had bragged about his bowling ability for weeks and he wasn't about to back down. Yeah, sure, he'd only gone bowling once, when he was like six years old on a school trip, but he was a master at Wii Sports, so how hard could the real-life version possibly be? Exactly. Even with the annoying and drugged-up teenagers and the squealing of two siblings while their parents bowled, there was no way he was going to lose.

Dave bumped elbows with him, snapping Karkat out of his daze. He looked up to see Dave's smirking face, "**You thinking 'bout how I'm gonna totally wipe your ass at this game?**"

"No way in fucking hell. I was comparing the differences between Wii Sports and real life. Oh, wait! There is none! Consider yourself absolutely owned," he spat back. Stupid fucking Striders and their prickish lackadaisical douchejerk responses.

"**Dude, have you ever actually bowled in real life before,**" Dave asked, lowering his eyebrows as if he was staring down the other boy.

"That's for me to know and for you to find out," he shouted back.

Dave burst out laughing in response, leaning against Karkat to regain his balance. He really, really wanted to step away and watch him crash onto the floor... maybe then he'd actually take off his stupid shitty sunglasses in public, but knowing Dave, he'd probably find some way to keep it on... It was part of that "Strider Charm" or whatever made-up thing he was rambling about.

"**Thought you were gonna ramble on 'bout the romanti...cies? Is that a word? Idk, it is now... Wait what was I saying,**" He paused, "**Oh right, anyway, don't expect me to go easy or anything. I pride myself on beating Rose in bowling, and y'know us Strilondes don't ever go easy.**"

"Good," Karkat spat, "I'll serve you a rainbow goddamn pile of go fuck yourself and beat your stupid ass because guess what? I'm fucking amazing at bowling." Okay, maybe that was a complete lie, but it wasn't like Dave had to know that.

"Cool, then I guess it won't be a problem to lift that sixteen-pound bowling ball over there then, right," Dave instigated? That smug motherfucker

"Oh, well aren't you just the funniest. Ha, fucking ha!" As they walked towards their assigned lane, Karkat realized that maybe saying that was a horrible idea... He didn't even know how to hold a bowling ball for Christ's sake! And even Dave was beginning to realize that!

"Dude, I can teach you how to play if you don't know how too... No shame here," Dave said, bumping shoulders with the shorter boy.

"Okay," he groaned, "Maybe I haven't played this stupid game before, but it's fine! All I have to do is roll this unnecessarily heavy bowling ball and knock over pins... How hard could it be?"

It turns out that bowling was in fact "hard." He had probably traumatized the little children a few lanes down with all his screeching, but hey, Dave was equally bad. Every shot of his went into the gutter... wait a goddamn moment...

"Dave I swear to fucking god if this is you trying to be ironic! What happened to those bowling skills you promised me?"

"Dude, the point of bowling is to get it in the gutter, right? And I'm fucking amazing at that, so are you. We're 'bout to go to the Olympics with these mad skills," Dave started, "Yo, I feel a rap coming on."

"No," Karkat groaned, cutting off his quote-quote 'sick beats.' "I know how bowling works, you pretentious writhing fuckmouth."

"Kay, while I'm going to be totally real and just come out with this, and no, not in that way, Kar. I know what you're thinking 'bout," he winked, "But for realsies, shit forget I just said that. Okay,

seriously though, this is my first time bowling too. Never really got the chance to as a kid, cuz it wasn't ironic enough, well you know the drill... Bro didn't really have the time or patience to ever really go bowling, and I couldn't convince Rose to ever take me because she's too posh. Thought I could maybe impress you with my mad bowling skills, but it turns out I don't have any. Guess that makes two of us, ey?"

"Did you really think I was going to dump you just because you can't bowl? Fuck, don't answer that. I promise I'm not that big of a douche, okay," Karkat looked up at him and smiled, "Plus, you've already seen my horrible skills and you haven't dumped me yet. You're still stuck with me."

"Shit, Kat, you're gonna make me cry... Seriously, thanks though, it means a lot to me," he said, bumping elbows with Karkat. "So, how 'bout we ditch this dumb sport and just get some slushies instead?"

"Fuck yeah, they better have blue raspberry or I'm suing."

So yeah, maybe they were poor university students, but that didn't mean they couldn't waste money on sugary frozen beverages every so often. Plus, it meant they got to torture the old man working at the counter by asking for two straws, for sharing purposes. The two ended up sitting in a corner booth far away from the front counter and the dirty looks parents were giving the pair. Karkat wasn't sure if it was over their language or relationship, or both, but he wasn't about to find out.

Dave leaned over the table towards Karkat as he placed his phone on the table. He was dangerously close to knocking over the slushie and every instinct inside of him screamed to move it away from him. "Dude," he paused for a second to control his laughter, "Did I ever show you this kick-ass photo I got of this young couple and their dog? They called it family pictures and literally put it in a baby onesie. Like, literal perfection. Who wouldn't want to see their dog in an onesie?"

He rolled his eyes in response, "Uhm, I mean, do you seriously want to try and fit a massive golden retriever or some shit in a fucking baby onesie? There's no way that'd end well."

His face lit up in glee, "Wait, oh my god! Karkat, we have to dress Crabdad in a onesie. Please. I'll go get my tripod and we can dress like suburban grill dads. We can make Christmas cards and everything. God, we're geniuses."

"Please, there's no way in hell Crabdad would ever, and I mean ever, not even in a million years, let us put clothes on him. He's particular about his appearance and I'd never make him do such a thing," Karkat scoffed, moving towards the phone's off button.

Dave simply swatted him away and instead laced their hands together. *Smooth*. "Nah, I've got this covered. He likes me more anyway. I'll be the photographer and the fashion designer, er- stylist? Whatever the hell it's called, I've got it down. All smooth sailing on this sea."

"Did you literally forget that we're friends with a famous fashion designer or is your brain just that puny and pathetic," he jeered.

"That's for you to decide," Dave laughed, and Karkat swore he could see him wink behind the shades.

For fuck's sake, he has about the strangle the bastard. "Oh shut the fuck up! I'm leaving and I'm taking this blue raspberry, or whatever the fuck you called it, and leaving! See you in hell."

"Wait, dude, are you serious? I was just flirting, y'know, like us Striders do. C'mon I'll do the puppy dog eyes, just don't leave yet." Dave pleaded. He couldn't tell if he was serious or not.

Karkat rolled his eyes, "Ugh, do the puppy dog eyes and I'm kicking you out of this building. No, don't give me that look you fucking bastard. Go away!" Now he was doing the sad puppy frown too goddammit. It wasn't even effective, it just made him look stupid. "Whatever, I'm getting out of this shitlicking garbage of a building before I get high off the fumes of tutti-fruity vapes, you can come with me, I guess, but I'm drinking the rest of this."

"Oh hell yes. Lemme just get the putant ass bowling shoes off of me and we can stroll downtown, like the couples in your movie, trying our best not to get robbed or cussed out by some fifty-year-old dude. Though I would love to hear you shout 'Ok boomer' at some random old guy. Maybe an

entire retirement home, but one in like Florida, where all the rich old assholes are," Dave rambled on as they took off the old shoes (that were totally not three sizes too small), and walked out of the bowling alley, that was breaking way too many health codes.

"God well aren't you just the romantic? I'm absolutely swooning," Karkat rolled his eyes, "And I would but, I spend my entire workday trying not to cuss out old men and I'd rather not start now!"

"Right, right. Customer service and all that dumb shit, hate that. Least it gives you money for college and all that stuff... and date nights..." Dave opened his mouth again as if he was debating to say more or keep his fucking mouth shut. "Wait... so, I'll see you on our next date... can I call it that? Well, obviously I'll see you around, you know I can't stay away from those Chick-Fil-A waiters, okay well mainly you, but like, okay wow I'm messing this up," Dave cringed, "Shit, am I bad at this or what... Okay, so what I'm trying to say is that, well, I'm really excited for our next outing, especially since the one and only Crabdad will be there too. So... I hope you're excited too..?"

"Fine, yes, okay... I'll admit that I'm excited, you huge fuck-licking clusterfuck of a person, if I could even call you one," Karkat retaliated.

"Awe, is that Karkat language for 'I love you?' Because I sure hope it is," Dave teased, "But really, I'm looking forward to it, and I'm super excited to see you later, Kar." He quickly jogged forward and wrapped the shorter boy in a hug, leaning down to place a kiss on his cheek, which he totally wasn't blushing about in the slightest. "Okay, okay I promise I'm leaving now. See you, babe... oh wait, shit, can I call you that?"

"Of fucking course you can call me that," Karkat said, exasperatedly. Okay, it was actually really cute that Dave even asked that, and he totally wasn't a blushing mess because of it. "And I love you too... Crabdad does too. Now get home before you embarrass yourself any further."

Karkat shook his head amusingly, turning in the opposite direction to his own shitty apartment. Maybe one day they'd have their own apartment together, overlooking the East Coast... once they paid their student loans off and had actual functioning jobs, of course. But for now, he was content with walking home in the dark, dreaming wistfully under the New Yorkian lights. And for once, he felt at peace with just waiting for the future.





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SALINESALTS











Late Night



@nubs_mcshouty on Twitter

Rating: T

Tags: Meteorstuck, hurt/comfort, toxic masculinity, canon-typical trauma, anxiety attacks

Nightmares were something he used to have often, but since he's been here on the meteor they've been pretty void. At least, until tonight apparently. He'd almost forgotten how intense they were until he shot awake with a racing heart and burning lungs, forehead slick with sweat.

He looked around, searching for something, anything. But he found nothing.

It was dark and he was alone.

He tried taking some deep breaths, trying to calm himself. His mouth felt dry and he could feel himself trembling. God, he hasn't felt this awful since he was back home. He put a hand to his chest, palm resting over his heart; it was beating hard and fast. He clenched his fist, fingers gripping his shirt, clinging to it as a way to ground him.

He needed to get up, he couldn't stand being in here in the dark where the shadows reminded him of figures in his dreams. He pushed the blankets off of him, feet hitting the floor as he stood. He trembled and felt light headed, but he stayed upright; a good sign.

He stepped towards the door that was open a crack, pushing it all the way open before he stepped out into the well lit hallway. This damn place was full of winding hallways that it took him forever to remember, but at least now he knew how to get to the kitchen. Or, at least the place they all considered the kitchen. The food was there, anyway.

He walked for what felt like hours, but was really only a few minutes, and soon he was at the kitchen. He froze in the doorway though, he didn't step a foot in; he realized he wasn't alone in here.

Across the room, perched on the counter, was Karkat. He was up late a lot of the time, he claimed he had trouble sleeping, always has. Hiding and living in fear from the drones did that to a guy. It

was obvious he was tired though, sleepy circles under his eyes as he read a book that he was holding in a hand. In his other hand was a drink, but Dave couldn't tell what it was from here.

Karkat noticed him first. Despite being tired, he was still a troll and his instincts were better than Dave's. He looked at the other boy with a curious gaze, lowering his book a bit as he stared at Dave who remained frozen in the doorway.

"Dave? What are you doing up?" His raspy voice pulled Dave out of his thoughts, and somehow even calmed him a little.

"O-oh, I uh..." He swallowed, hoping it would sooth his dry and somewhat sore throat, "Thirsty, came to get something."

"Oh," Karkat said, relaxing his shoulders, "We've got coffee? But that's probably not what you need if you're planning on heading back to bed after this."

Dave quirked an eyebrow, relaxing a tad now that his mind was distracted by something else, "You're drinking coffee?"

Karkat shrugged, "I'm gonna be up all night anyway."

"Dude, you should at least try and get some sleep sometimes," Dave said, finally stepping into the kitchen, slowly approaching the troll perched on the counter.

"Eh, I'll be okay. I'll take a nap or something later," Karkat said, setting his cup down along with his book.

Dave debated with himself for a moment. To have coffee or to not have coffee, that was the question. Coffee wasn't something he needed in the middle of the night (day?) but really, would he be going back to sleep after the state that nightmare put him in? He really didn't feel like going back to dreamland right now.

"I'll have a cup," Dave said, which seemed to surprise Karkat, but the troll turned and grabbed him a clean cup anyway and passed it to him, "Thanks."

Dave grabbed the pot and poured a full cup, taking a sip. It tasted really damn good, but he was thirsty and everything tasted better when you were parched. Karkat watched him as the boy in sunglasses leaned back against the opposite counter, and he was able to see he was tense.

"Are you feeling okay? You seem a little out of it," Karkat questioned, and Dave's shoulders tensed again.

"I-I'm fine," He stammered, which was not helping. He cleared his throat and avoided Karkat's eyes as he tried to rebound, "I just woke up Kar, you can't expect me to be one-hundred percent the dope motherfucker I am all the time, even though I am one-hundred percent the dope motherfucker I am all the time right now I'm just like, one-hundred percent the dope motherfucker I am all the time but tired."

Karkat simply rolled his eyes at that, "Well, excuse me for asking."

That was a close one. Dave released a tired sigh and looked down at his coffee, seeing a half ass reflection of himself in it. Man, he looked like shit. No wonder Karkat thought something was wrong. He let his finger glide around the rim of his cup, other hand gripping it maybe a little too tightly; he was still trembling.

"Hey Kar? Why can't you sleep at night?" His voice was low and even, and though Dave's voice was usually pretty deadpan, something was different this time.

He sounded... sad?

Karkat was surprised by the question and more so Dave's way of asking it; he raised an eyebrow in curiosity, "What?"

"I don't know, just trying to make conversation I guess..." Dave said with a shrug, "We're both up so why not, you know?"

Karkat was silent for a moment, watching Dave closely, but he answered a moment later, "I told you: for pretty much my entire life, I've been hiding from the drones and being in the dark by myself like that just reminds me of those days."

Dave was quiet as he let that process through his mind, then he asked, "So... Do you ever have dreams about those times? Is that maybe why you don't want to go to sleep?"

And then Karkat was quiet again, and this time it was quiet for a while. He knew something was up, but now it was even more obvious. Dave's fingers were twitching around his cup, eyebrows furrowed slightly in distress, and that was a look he never saw on Dave's face.

He was never up this late either, and now here he was asking questions about Karkat's sleeping habits, as if he were trying to... relate to somebody...

"Dave," Karkat spoke after a long moment of silence that made Dave's fidgeting worse than it had been before, "Are you okay?"

For some reason, that question hit him differently. It almost... hurt to hear? He couldn't understand why, but maybe it was because people had never really asked him how he felt before.

At least, not until recently, and he'd never really heard it spoken before. So yeah, it pulled on his heartstrings a little.

"Dave?" Karkat said his name again when he stayed silent, and Dave flinched and turned his head to look at Karkat. He was looking at him with concern, it was the softest look he'd seen Karkat give him.

It also hurt. It hurt so bad.

"I-I--" He didn't really know what to say, he didn't even know how to control how he felt at this moment. He felt... vulnerable, and he didn't like feeling vulnerable, "I, uh--"

He couldn't even form sentences, which was a red flag for Karkat. Yeah, Dave's rambling usually didn't make much sense anyway, but Dave not being able to speak at all? That was concerning. Karkat leaned forward, trying to get a closer look and he began to speak again, "Dave, is there something you want to tell me?"

Silence, but then a nod.

Well, that's progress.

"I think I know what it is," Karkat said, and Dave was quiet, so Karkat just said it, "You had a bad dream, right?"

Again, silence, but the way Dave's attitude changed confirmed his answer. Karkat slumped his shoulders, eyes flicking to see Dave's hands trembling pretty intensely around his cup, "Dave..."

Suddenly, the white-haired boy turned and placed his cup down before he reached a hand up and pushed it through his hair. He was beginning to panic, "I-I just--"

"You don't have to tell me about it if you don't want to," Karkat said without thinking as Dave began to wring his hands.

"N-no, I..." Dave took a deep breath but exhaled it quickly, signalling his panic was getting worse, "I want to."

Karkat watched his fingers twitch against each other, the almost terrified look on his face making his concern deeper, "Dave--"

"I-I'm sorry, this isn't like me," Dave said, voice strained; it was showing one hundred times more emotion than it ever did, "Sorry, I just..."

He couldn't gather his thoughts, everything hurt too bad; Karkat frowned, "Dave..."

It was only now that Karkat really took in the sight before him. Dave looked pale, a sheen on his forehead from where he had been sweating. His fingers were twitching, hands twisting as he sort of rocked back and forth in place. His breathing was also elevated, and Karkat just knew his heart was racing.

"Dave," Karkat suddenly stuck out one hand, wanting to grab Dave but knowing that probably wasn't such a good idea right now, so instead this is what he did, "Grab my hand."

"H-huh?" Dave mumbled, turning his head to look at the outstretched hand before him. It certainly looked tempting, but when he saw it suddenly in front of his face he couldn't help but see a flash in his mind of a time when a hand that close to his face meant he was about to get hurt.

But this time was different. Dave shakily lifted one of his hands, letting his fingers brush against Karkat's palm and when Karkat didn't pull away Dave let himself wrap his fingers around the other boy's hand. Karkat squeezed his hand with his own, and it was gentle and soft and soothing. Karkat wasn't going to hurt him.

Dave couldn't help it and he hated it so much, but he let out a choked sob as he stared at Karkat's hand holding onto his so gently.

"Oh my God, Dave..." Karkat scooted forward a bit, pulling Dave a little closer so he wasn't so alone.

"I'm sorry..." Dave said quietly, voice barely even audible.

"What are you saying sorry for?" Karkat asked, voice softer than usual as he tried to calm down the other.

Dave sniffled and shrugged his shoulders, stumbling over his words as he tried to explain, "I-I shouldn't be telling you any of this. I can't be telling you how I feel, I-- I--"

He just bowed his head after that, not wanting to look at Karkat while he was like this. Karkat was only quiet for a moment, only because he was surprised, "And why not?"

"B-because..." He... didn't really know actually. He just knows what he was always told, "Because it's weak? I-I have to be strong or we can't win this game. I have to be strong so I can protect everyone, so I can protect you! I--"

"Hey," Karkat squeezed his hand, which halted Dave's words, "You're not weak for talking about this sort of stuff. Actually, I think it takes more strength to talk about how you feel than to ignore how you feel."

"R-really?" Dave choked out, having a bit of a hard time breathing, "My-my bro always told me it-it was weak."

"Okay, but Dave, who do you trust more here? Your bro, or *me*?" Karkat asked him, and that sort of threw Dave for a loop.

He'd... never really thought about anything like this before. He's not been around his brother in three years, he's not even alive anymore. Why is he still afraid of him? Maybe because for thirteen years he was treated more like a toy than a person with feelings. Maybe because when he closes his eyes he can still see and hear and feel everything that ever happened.

But then again, it hasn't hurt as bad since he's been here. Not since he met his sister and all these trolls and Karkat.

"Karkat, I--" He choked again, cutting himself off as he shuffled forward a bit and reached out his other hand, grabbing for Karkat.

The dark-haired boy was surprised by this development, but he wasn't going to deny what Dave was asking for right now. Hell, he almost wonders if Dave ever even had one of these. He grabbed Dave's shirt and pulled him closer, and Dave was quick to discard his glasses and latch onto him.

His hands found Karkat's shirt, clinging to him and pulling him closer as he buried his face against his chest and cried. Karkat was surprised by how quickly Dave melted against him, and it made him frown. He put a hand on the back of Dave's head, fingers threading through his hair as his other arm just grabbed onto his shirt and supported him.

Dave never thought he'd be here, scared to death of his dreams and standing between Karkat Vantas' legs, crying against his chest. But here he was, and he didn't even feel bad in admitting it felt *good*.

Was this what he'd been missing from his life?

"Karkat, I'm so sorry... I'm sorry..." Dave cried, wetting the other boy's shirt with his tears.

Karkat just rested his chin on top of Dave's head and tightened his hold on him, hoping it made him feel safer, "It's okay, Dave. Nothing to be sorry for."

Dave continued to sob, clinging to Karkat tightly, like if he let go the other boy would just disappear. He didn't want him to disappear. He didn't even think he'd ever have something like this, a relationship like this. To be honest, he wasn't even sure what their relationship even was, but he knew it was something good.

He didn't want to lose this.

"Please, don't go... Don't go..." He pleaded, turning his head so the side of his face rested against Karkat's chest, making it easier to breathe now.

Karkat actually felt his own eyes burn at that, and suddenly he was biting his lip to keep those tears from rolling down his cheeks. Instead he just hugged Dave tighter, hoping it reassured him, "I'm not, Dave. I'm not."

Dave just continued to cry, and he did for a while, at least until he tired himself out and resorted to sniffing. Karkat didn't let him go, and he wouldn't until Dave was ready. He just gently pushed his claws against Dave's scalp, which seemed to sooth him well.

Moments passed and eventually the room was silent save for an occasional snuffle and the sound of Karkat's heartbeat where Dave had his ear pressed against his chest. It was calming to listen to.

Karkat turned his head down, trying to look at Dave. He was curious and concerned, so he had to ask, "Dave? Are you okay?"

The other boy moved around a bit under his arm, seeming to feel a bit embarrassed about what just happened, but he didn't try pulling away. Not yet, "Yeah."

It was a short answer, and it didn't make Karkat feel too warm and fuzzy, "Are you sure?"

It was silent, and Dave finally released a tension filled sigh. He loosened his grasp on Karkat's shirt before he started to back up, but just a little bit. His hands slid back a bit, instead clinging to the front of Karkat's shirt now as he lifted his head to look at the boy who was still perched on the counter.

"I'm..." He wanted to apologize again, but seeing the concerned look on Karkat's face made him stop there. Karkat didn't need an apology, all he cared about was making sure Dave was actually okay.

Dave couldn't help it; he smiled.

"I'm okay," He said, his smile tired and kind of sad, but it was obvious there was some gratitude and legitimate happiness behind it, "Thank you."

Karkat was taken aback for a moment because, wow, Dave's eyes are really pretty. He rarely ever saw them, and when he did it was never for long. Seeing Dave's smile paired with his bright eyes was enough to pull Karkat's lips into a small smile as well.

"No need," He said in reply, still holding onto Dave's shirt too.

It was silent for a moment then, at least until Dave seemed to feel uncomfortable staring into Karkat's eyes for a prolonged period of time. So, he averted his eyes and tried to change the subject, "So, um..."

Karkat listened and furrowed his eyebrows curiously as Dave continued to stammer, watching him lift a hand to scratch the back of his head nervously, "Hm?"

"I-I was just like, wondering, if maybe uh... You'd like to uh... Maybe..." Okay Dave, come on, this isn't even a hard question to ask, "Do you wanna watch a movie or something?"

Karkat opened his mouth to speak, but of course, Dave began to ramble, "I-I mean, it's okay if you don't want to! I understand if you've had too much unwarranted Dave time tonight! I get it, don't worry! Sometimes I have too much Dave time too! Sometimes I just wish I could shut the hell up, you know? Kinda like right now! Haha! Ha! Ha..."

"Oh my God, stop," Karkat said, before he surprised Dave with what he said next, "There's never too much Dave time, and it's never unwarranted."

That... actually made Dave's face burn. Karkat wasn't slow to notice this, seeing the red hue brighten his face. The sight of it made his face turn red as well, and he turned his head away and cleared his throat, "Uh, anyway. We should uh..."

"Yeah," Dave said, finally moving back from Karkat and letting him go, "Let's go."

Karkat nodded and hopped off the counter, leaving his coffee to get cold as he led Dave out of the kitchen and into the "lounge room." He quickly picked out a DVD and showed it to Dave, asking if it was okay to watch. Dave didn't seem to mind, never really did. So, Karkat popped it into the DVD player and pressed PLAY before he turned and found the couch, flopping down onto his back, upper body halfway resting on the arm.

He looked up at Dave, gesturing for him to sit with him, "Well? Are you gonna sit down or what?"

Dave smirked as he moved forward towards the other, "This is hella gay, bro."

Karkat simply rolled his eyes, "Whatever."

Dave sat on the couch before he crawled over to Karkat, practically lying on top of him and letting his head rest on his chest; he could listen to his heartbeat this way.

He smiled, "Yeah, whatever."











Midnight Rendezvous



@roundandtalented

Rating: T

Tags: Witness protection, Moving, Agoraphobia, No Game AU, Trolls on Earth AU

Moving is awful. You've done it twice in your short excuse for a life and honestly, gotta say, you're not a fan. Packing up all your shit sucked. Trying to make important things fit into the back of Dirk's truck? Also sucked. The twenty-six hour drive to a state you're not sure you and your brother can afford to live in? Sucks for the whole twenty-six friggin' hours.

(At least he was fine with you playing what you wanted for music the whole ride. Maybe he's so wound tight about everything he actually wants to not micromanage something in his life for once. Wow.)

Being relocated the first week of summer makes you feel like your whole life is getting a reset. And not just because some uptight woman in a suit told you that. It's true, she was right. You and Dirk are getting a hard-reset, and it's weird to think that your whole life up 'til now, you're not even sure you did anything that needed to be erased like some sorta botched save file.

You've just been here, vibing best you can. And now you're in some picket fence neighborhood, standing out like a sore thumb amongst all the nuclear families mowing the lawn or sitting on their porches with a beer while their 2.5 kids and a dog play in the yard.

"How long d'you think it takes someone to call the cops on us?" You ask, voice strained as you try carrying two boxes of records up the driveway in the same trip.

"Depends how loud you play tonight." Your brother shrugs, closing the drivers side door and shouldering his backpack. "But I'd give it two days at least before they forget we moved in." When he unlocks the front door, you're struck with the overwhelming sense of inadequacy upon the first look into your new home.

The only real furniture you brought with you is a futon, and two dressers. The rest is coming in a U-box shipping container in about a week, but even then. You've lived in a one bedroom apartment most of your life, and this house feels unreal. Dirk said it's considered a smaller house, for a three bedroom. And that normally, if renovations were done, it'd be a two bedroom with an en suite instead.

Still. If it wasn't covered by your crazy situation, it'd be something totally unattainable to two reasonably broke dudes whose incomes are tied directly to the internet.

You may not have to pay for the house thanks to the witness protection program, but you still will have to cover monthly living expenses in one of the most expensive states in the country. There's a reason this house was repossessed by the bank, and you really don't want to think about whoever lived here before you, or what happened to them.

You were kind of a shut-in when you lived in Texas, but something about the new neighborhood and how pristine it is wigs you out something fierce. Dirk used to only leave to get supplies or take you on a snack run, so usually if you wanted to go photograph cool shit, you went by yourself. You lived in Houston for a good ten years, so you'd gotten used to the big city vibe.

You can only see so many cowboy boots and truck nuts before you kind of just have to accept that it's a way of life, and that going to the local Coldstone wasn't a harrowing experience. At least not every time.

There's a McDonald's about a fifteen minute walk from your new house, according to Google. You spend an hour trying to figure out which outfit will get you the least looks on your walk- but you only have so many tshirt and jeans combos, and the heat, while close to Texas levels, isn't helping the way you're sweating, standing in front of the door.

"Goin' somewhere?" Dirk asks, toweling his hair dry as he watches you through both the mirror's reflection and the bathroom doorway.

"McDicks."

"Bring me home some fries?"

"The saddest, limpest motherfuckers you ever did see."

"Nice."

And you intend to! You really do! But you only get the door open a moment before some joggers pass the house, and the kids across the road look your way and-

The door slams shut, your heart racing, your fear a deep burrowing pit in your chest. Did you do that? Yeah, you did - you're leaning against the door, and Dirk is watching you in the mirror with a single raised eyebrow, not saying a word.

"**Forgot my keys.**" You lie, and quickly head back to your room, struggling not to walk too fast, keys heavy in your pants pocket.

Dirk doesn't question you. He doesn't even prod when three hours later you come back downstairs and make some ramen on the stove. It smells like defeat, but also a comfortable habit.

It's real agoraphobia hours, and you're fucking hungry.

He just sits incorrectly on a folding chair, laptop balanced on his knee rather than the table between you, absorbed in his work.

"**Have you met any of the neighbors yet?**" You ask him, blowing on your hot food. You've not seen him leave the house yet, but you have your suspicions he has. He's just quieter about it than you are.

"**Yeah. It's a bunch of young families with kids by the look of it. A few teens sat on our lawn earlier.**" He doesn't glance up, but the rapid tapping on his keyboard pauses.

"**Across the road and two houses to the right - they're either polyam or Mom has a secret boyfriend.**"

Oh. So he's not spoken to anyone, he's just been watching out the windows and narrating their lives to himself, huh? Alright.

Some people play The Sims, your brother has binoculars and a notebook. Everyone's got something weird they do, right? He's just a little quirky, but he means well.

Honestly he probably started it for the same reason you started making comics - it was easier to focus on other people's lives than on your own.

"**Good for her? Get it, I guess.**" You slurp up some noodles and he stands, setting his laptop down.

"**Need you to make a grocery list dude. I know we've got like, the basics from the drive over, but put some fun stuff on, not just Poptarts.**" Dirk hands you a pen and a notebook, and you nod as you set them away from your meal. Unless he wants ramen on it, you're not touching it until you're done.

"And Dave?" He scoops up his laptop and begins to head towards the stairs.

"Mmm?" You make a point to look at him with your mouth full of noodles, some hanging out.

"Try and relax. We're safe here."

Once the sun is down, and all the houses around yours go dark, you head to the room at the end of the upstairs hall that is intended to serve as a workshop. All of your DJ equipment is still in boxes, but Dirk has at least started unpacking his shit, even if there's nowhere to store it yet.

The two of you are still keeping your clothes in suitcases- both because of the lack of furniture in the house for a few more days, and because unpacking is so fucking shit to do. You don't want to look at every shirt you own, or item with cursed memories attached to it.

You kind of just want to exist.

And since it's pitch black outside, you figure the roof is a good place to exist. Hopefully without all the panic from earlier.

The workshop has a tiny balcony on it that Dirk intends to use for any projects that need spray paint or sealant. He used to lean out the window to do that shit in Texas, but it's kind of nice that there's a real space for it here that doesn't have him risking falling 20+ stories if he slips. The most that would happen to you now would be rolling down the side of the roof before tumbling into some overgrown bushes. There's even a lattice fence thing nearby to climb back up with, so really, you're golden.

Thankfully you don't fall. You climb up and you just sit there on your roof, dicking around on your phone and enjoying being able to look up at the stars without too brutal of an obnoxious glow from the city.

It's nice enough that you don't need your shades.

At about the hour mark, you've chilled to the point of laying down, just watching airplanes fly overhead, and trying to pick them out from the satellites. It's wild that there's whole other planets out there in space, looking down at you. And seriously bonkers that some of them are so much worse off than the rock you live on.

You hear some noise to your left, and a window snaps open a moment after you pause your music. When you turn, you have to squint still in the darkness to spot someone climbing out of the second floor and onto the roof.

Your new neighborhood is very cookie cutter, copy pasted house designs full of nuclear families, and the houses really aren't even built that far apart. So you can see that the person now mirroring you on top of their own home isn't aware of you yet.

They have a book with them, and a reading light. When they sit down and flick it on, you have the delight of spotting your very first non-nuclear neighbor.

They're a troll.

Texas wasn't kind to trolls. Not that most of Texas was kind to humans either, but, you recall several instances that made you angry *for* trolls, because they continued to get the short end of the stick.

Here though, you're not sure what the case is. You've not left your house yet, technically, so you've not checked to see what the locals think of not only you, but literal aliens now living amongst the population as refugees.

Your neighbor has a curly mess of hair that rivals the shape of yours if you let it get long, but you have to search for the iconic troll horns to find them. They're not scary long horns like anything you've seen on the news broadcasts, and this troll really doesn't look that big either.

They can't be more than 5ft2. So are they just young? You've seen the humans that live in that house, and they're middle aged, which leads you to believe the troll is likely just staying with them, or is adopted.

Probably the second option.

"What the fuck are you looking at?" A gruff voice interrupts your thoughts.

Oh balls, they spotted you. He? Spotted you? You think He.

You fumble with your phone, dropping it in a panic and then having to chase it a little ways down the roof as it begins to slide. You snatch it back up, but any semblance of cool vibes has been washed away by your glorious spaghetti moment.

"**Howdy neighbor,**" You try, waving. Why are you waving? He wasn't friendly, he wasn't saying hi. He caught you staring at him!

"Fuck off."

He squints at you in the glow of his book light, and there's challenge behind it. He's not getting off his roof, so you need to leave.

"Uh, no." Wow, you're kind of at a loss with this. He's the first person you felt might be approachable, and he told you to fuck off. Blind optimism is about the only thing you can come up with, so you pick yourself up, and move over to the edge of the roof closest to his house. When you sit back down, feet hanging over the edge, he's still watching you and hasn't moved an inch.

"Hi. I'm Dave." You plop your phone down in your lap. "I just moved in."

"I know."

"You knew my name?"

He sputters and slaps his book against his face as if he were face-palming.

"No, fucknuts, I knew you just moved in!"

"Oh. Yeah, I guess." You shrug, and he does lower his book down. "So what's your name?"

You're going for kind of annoying, but in the way people sometimes find endearing. Maybe you can annoy him into friendship? That seems to work well enough for some of your friends online.

"Karkat."

He's still squinting at you, and now you're able to see the roundness to his face that matches the soft curve of his horns. The soft curve of his everything, really. He looks around your age, but either he doesn't sleep much or he's got some years on you, because those eye bags are killer.

"What do you want?"

You don't really have much of a thought-to-text filter, so it just comes out of you.

"Someone to talk to."

His grumpy face falls and you immediately feel like an asshole for saying it, but it's *true*. You were too scared of the neighborhood to go to fucking McDonald's and the only person you've spoken to offline for the past four days has been your brother.

You want some fucking company.

"Okay."

Karkat picks himself up, bringing his book and light with him, and walks over to the edge of his roof closest to you. There's only a small grass corridor between you - it's ten feet apart maximum. Enough you wouldn't want to try jumping.

He sits himself down, and sighs, like he's trying to act put out, but doesn't want to tell you no either.

"I can talk for fucking hours so be prepared to cut me off at some point because I WILL keep going and I WILL be an asshole at several points during this conversation." He keeps his book in his lap, face lit from below like he's about to tell spooky stories at a campfire or some shit.

"Oh man same, but like, sorry in advance for inserting song lyrics or movie lines into the conversation at any point. If you don't laugh I'll just assume you have poor taste."

"My taste in music is questionable, but my taste in movies is top tier and that's not up for debate." He shrugs and raises a thick bushy eyebrow at you as if to challenge you into opening this topic for discussion.

You don't want to start your talk with the neighbor troll as an argument though. You just wanna chill and talk. Maybe a little bickering, just for fun.

When he does take the opportunity to launch into talking, he picks the worst question to ask.

"Where did you live before you moved here?"

Fucking, shitballs, fuck, goddamnit! You're not sure you're allowed to even tell people that? Does witness protection allow that? Does your accent not give you away already?

"Fuck, I know very little country music, music reference doesn't work." You pull up your phone and start frantically googling, but Karkat is already squinting.

"The only location based country song I'd even know is Sweet Home Alabama, so don't strain yourself for nothing." Karkat crosses his legs under himself, apparently a bit of a fidget.

"Well it's not that one, but same vibe."

"I could just go look at the plates on your truck?"

Oh. You totally forgot about that part. Guess everyone else knows then - except Karkat, you suppose? There's no point in hiding it then.

"Texas. It was kind of a hasty move, so we just drove."

He nods, plops his book down in his lap.

"Ok, your turn. Ask me a question." The way he looks at you, either his eyes have some tapida lucidum shit going on, or they actually glow in the dark. Hella weird, but honestly you've not spent time with trolls at night before.

"We're playing Twenty Questions?" You're not opposed, just surprised.

"Sure, why the fuck not. Take the opportunity to be nosy if you want." Why does he always sound grumpy? Maybe that's just how he talks?

"Uhhhh, how long have you been here?"

"Here as in this house, or here as in 'you're an alien go back to your planet'?" His eyes are narrow, judging little slits, and you can absolutely tell this guy has a chip on his shoulder. He must have been bullied mercilessly in highschool. Middleschool. Shit, probably his whole time on earth.

"Both, but like, in a culturally sensitive way."

He snorts, rolling his eyes.

"No I mean it, in a 'how much have you experienced and do you like it' kinda way." You try to clarify, feeling like an asshole. You deserve it, sure, but he just basically did the same shit you did.

"This house, about five years. This planet? Eight, I think. There's a time measurement difference, but I basically came down when I was six sweeps, so around thirteen in human years. Not long after the first batch of refugees. As soon as it was an option, I took the next ship in my area that was fleeing." He shrugs, as if it's no big deal, "The foster care system sucks, but my family now is good. I'd probably not have made it to my adult form if I stayed on Alternia."

Holy fuck. So it really is true that it's brutal there. Killing kids and shit.

"Well I'm glad you're here then."

When he smiles at you it's so genuine you can't help yourself in grinning back. Karkat has a cute smile, and his teeth hang over his bottom lip, even if it's not a grin like yours. His posture softens, and you feel yourself relax too. This is good. This is nice.

"Your turn." You remind him, and he shifts again, pants catching on a shingle and causing him to grumble at it before stretching his legs out to mirror you.

Going by the dates he gave you, he's actually a year older than you, but he's clearly almost a foot shorter. Weren't most trolls supposed to be fucking huge once they were adults? Weird.

"Who's the guy you came with?"

Oh. So he's been watching you. Or at least, watching the windows. Eh, you've been just as curious too, you suppose.

"My brother Dirk."

"He looks out the window a lot."

"Yeah. We used to live in an apartment? So this picket fence setup is new and a little weird. He's nosy, so like, don't be surprised if you catch him staring or some shit."

Karkat barks out a laugh and shakes his head.

"He'll fit in just fine. Everyone on this fucking block is so nosy and up in everyone else's business." He informs you, and while he closes his book, he keeps the light on so that you can see him.

"This is fun." You admit, a bit sheepish, but you're excited to ask him another question. "Movies were right, twenty questions is good."

"It's weirdly very cinematic, isn't it?" He agrees, stuffing one hand in the pocket of his oversized hoodie. "All we need is some tin cans and a string, and it's hollywood-ready."

Your game continues until the two of you are laying on your respective roofs, too tired to keep going, at which point you call it a night and agree for a repeat the next day.

Karkat totally flips his shit when you show up, same time, same place, with some honest to god cans on a string. Except you miscalculated the string length needed so it falls short when you try to toss one end to his house, and he laughs himself hoarse at you.

He gives you his phone number in place of the cans, and then his Pesterchum handle just in case. He's grouchy and types in all caps, and his rants about bad movies are crazy endearing. And very slowly, your anxiety about leaving your house starts to fade into the background. But with time passing, the U-box arrives and Dirk starts spending more late nights in the work room.

Which is what leads you to eventually deciding you can attempt to meet Karkat on the ground at midnight, rather than on the roof for once.

It's a step in the right direction, you think. Because you don't need your brother listening in on your conversations with the cute neighbor, and you *do* need to get used to walking around the yard of the home you fucking live in.

So you slip out the back door, bare foot, and tiptoe over to the crease in the grass between your yard, and Karkat's. The light flicks on over his back porch, and the door slides open. Out peers your friend- because you're friends now. You don't just play twenty questions for two weeks and meet up each night and NOT become friends with the guy... You also couldn't help crushing on someone so charming and funny.

Oops.

Karkat closes the door behind him and walks across the little deck, over to the stairs where he sits down and pats the place next to him.

You hesitate, but he waves his hand in a 'come here' motion, and oh, shit.... fuck, yeah you can do this. There's a cute troll boy who wants you to come sit with him! You can do this!

Dew covered grass sticks to the bottoms of your feet, and you step on at least two hidden thistles, but you eventually plop down beside him, and it's like you're back on the roof, talking each other's ears off in a conversation that's half the fun kind of argument.

Only he's right beside you and now you get to see up close how animated he is as he talks at you. Rants at you, really.

"**Highschool is rough for everyone, it's a universal constant,**" You offer, but he shakes his head.

"I lasted one week, Dave. ONE. Not only was I very lost on all of earth history class topics, but I had classmates quoting old 90s TV series at me daily. None of them were even alive when Invader Zim was airing, and they STILL asked if I had ears, every fucking day." Five minutes in and he's practically frothing at the mouth while the claws on his left hand dig into the wood the two of you are seated on.

"**So you just homeschool'd after that?**"

"Until last year. That's old for humans to be doing highschool but I knew none of Earth's shit at thirteen so it took a while to catch up." You nod, but really, you're still watching him. The way he talks, the way his whole body shifts when he gets into a conversation.

You blink, a little dazed, as you realize he's asked you another question. Balls.

"Uhhh."

"Dave." He meets your gaze, determination clearly there but you have no idea what for.

"Can I kiss you?"

Oh fuck. Shit.

Your brain to mouth filter craps out for what must be the hundredth time since you met Karkat on the roof, and you blurt out exactly what you're thinking.

"Not if I kiss you first."

"What?"

He's confused for a second, and then you plant one on him. The quickest smooch you can steal! Right on the mouth! Because if you do it fast, you can't chicken out!

"What the fuck, no fair!"

You laugh when Karkat grabs your hand, then snatches a return kiss right back. And then you're both laughing, dumb and excited, warm in the cheeks.

It's so stupid and cliché, but whatever. You're having fun. You can have some little midnight rendezvous on Karkat's back porch, as a treat.

By total chance, you happen to look back to your house just in time to catch your brother standing at the back door. He's got his phone held up to the glass to take a picture, and you think you see him wink, then he shuts the blinds.

Nosy prick!

You're about to tell Karkat you've been caught, but his hand touches your face oh so gently, and then oops! Oh no! You're kissing him again, what a clear distraction from being annoyed at your sibling!

It's hard to be mad at Dirk if you're too busy making out with Karkat. Which, by the way, is occupying most of your brain cells at the moment. You can only think about Karkat, and how you really needed a little bit of happiness like this.















